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THE CAROL OF THE TWELVE NUMBERS.

THE following fragment,<sup>1</sup> representing family tradition going back at least a century, may be recognized as part of a carol belonging to the Christmas season. As the comparative history of this carol has not been fully discussed, it may not be without interest to consider its different English forms, as well as its diffusion in Europe:—

Twelve, the twelve apostles;  
Eleven, the eleven who went to heaven;  
Ten, the ten commandments;  
Nine, the nine, how bright they shine;  
Eight, the royal martyrs;  
Seven, the seven stars in the sky;  
Six, . . .  
Five, . . .  
Four, the gospel preachers;  
Three, . . .  
Two, the two lily-white babes clothed all in green, O!  
One's the one who dwells alone, and ever more shall do so.

A more complete version is contained in the "Bizarre Notes and Queries," Manchester, N. H., vol. vi. No. 2, 1889, p. 248, being contributed to that journal by Rev. J. H. Hopkins, from the singing of children in Essex, N. Y., who, during a residence on the southern shore of Lake Superior, had caught it by ear from Cornish miners employed in the copper mines of that region. In reprinting, I venture to make some slight changes of punctuation.

The carol is sung by two voices, alternating with successive lines, the numbers previously given being repeated in chorus:—

*1st voice.* Come and I will sing you!  
*2d voice.* What will you sing me?  
*1st voice.* I will sing you One, O!  
*2d voice.* What is your One, O?  
*1st voice.* One of them is God alone, and He ever shall remain so.

Come and I will sing you!  
What will you sing me?  
I will sing you two, O!  
What is your two, O?  
Two of them are lily-white babes, all clothed in green, O!  
*Chorus.* One of them is God alone, and He ever shall remain so.

<sup>1</sup> Contributed by Mrs. R. B. Storer, of Cambridge, Mass., formerly of Concord, Mass.

The carol continues in the same manner, and the conclusion and summary being :—

Come and I will sing you !  
 What will you sing me ?  
 I will sing you twelve, O !  
 What is your twelve, O ?  
 Twelve are the twelve apostles,  
*Chorus.* Eleven of them have gone to heaven,  
 Ten are the ten commandments,  
 Nine is the moonshine, bright and clear,  
 Eight is the Great Archangel.  
 Seven are seven stars in the sky,  
 Six are the cheerful waiters,  
 Five is the ferryman in the boat  
 Four are the gospel preachers,  
 Three of them are strangers,  
 Two of them are lily-white babes, all clothed in green, O !  
 One of them is God alone, and He ever shall remain so.

In addition to the three versions already given, must be named others printed in "Notes and Queries," namely (4) 1st Ser. 9, 325; (5, 6) 4th Ser. 2, 599; (7) 3, 90; (8, 9) 10, 412, 499. See also 4th Ser. 3, 183. In these may be noted, beside other variations, the following: for the number three (instead of strangers, etc.), divers, riders, or shrivers; for five, flamboys under the bough (4), tumblers on a board (6), flamboys (*flambeaux*, lights) on the bourn (coast) (9); for six, bold waiters (4), proud walkers (8), broad waters (9); for eight, Gabriel angels (6); for nine, the nine of the bridal shine (9). A tenth version is more corrupt, 4th Ser. 3, 90.

The composer of this carol must have had some distinct idea in his mind with reference to the mystic meaning of each of these numbers, but it is not now, in all cases, possible to discover what this significance was. The correct reading for nine seems to be that last given, the bridal shine having reference to the nine orders of angels, supposed to be present at the marriage of the Lamb (so a writer in "Notes and Queries," *loc. cit.*). The original explanation of six may have had reference to the miracle of the turning of the six water-pots into wine at the marriage in Cana. Eight appears to have denoted the archangels. The lily-white babes *may* refer to Christ and John the Baptist,<sup>1</sup> and the three strangers, etc., to the three men of the East, who came to worship Jesus.

The version numbered above as (5) is independent of the others:

One they do call the righteous man.  
 Save poor souls to rest, amen.

<sup>1</sup> It is possible, however, that, in this number, what was originally a refrain has become part of the text, replacing the original meaning. (See *Notes and Queries*, 4th Ser. 10, 452.)

The "righteous man" must mean Christ. Two is said to be the Jewry (tables of the law?), and three the Trinity. The following numbers are confused with another carol, that of the Joys of Mary. The refrain "Save poor souls to rest" evidently belongs to the old ballad style, and must carry the carol back to a period before the reign of Elizabeth.

A third independent form of the carol is printed by Davies Gilbert ("Some Ancient Christmas Carols," Lond. 1823, No. 13), and in a slightly different form by W. Sandys ("Christmas Carols," Lond. 1833, p. 135). As given by the latter, it proceeds as follows, beginning with a refrain:—

In those twelve days, and in those twelve days, let us be glad,  
For God of his power hath all things made.

What is that which is but one?  
What is that which is but one?  
We have but one God alone  
In heaven above sits on his throne.

The verse is then repeated with requisite alterations, the meaning of the numbers being two testaments, three persons in the Trinity, four Gospels, five senses, six ages (this world shall last, five of them are gone and past), seven days in the week, eight beatitudes (are given, use them well and go to heaven), nine degrees of angels (high, which praise God continually), ten commandments, eleven thousand virgins (did partake and suffered death for Jesus' sake), twelve apostles.

Sandys and Gilbert obtained their carols, it would seem, from broadsides; Gilbert says the carol was not recited in this century.

J. Sylvester, "A Garland of Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern," Lond. 1861, p. 136, gives a piece called "A New Dial," which, according to his statement, appears to bear date of 1625, being taken from a leaf of an old almanac, preserved in the British Museum. This quaint Puritan alteration of the older number-song is worth attention:—

One God, one Baptism, and one Faith,  
One Truth there is, the Scripture saith.

Two Testaments (the Old and New)  
We do acknowledge to be true.

Three persons are in Trinity,  
Which make one God in Unity.

Four sweet Evangelists there are,  
Christ's birth, life, death, which do declare.

Five senses (like Five Kings) maintain  
In every man a several reign.

Six days to labor, is not wrong,  
For God himself did work so long.

Seven Liberal Arts hath God sent down,  
With Divine skill man's soul to crown.

Eight in Noah's Ark alive were found,  
When (in a word) the World lay drowned.

Nine Muses (like the heaven's nine spheres)  
With sacred Tunes entice our ears.

Ten Statutes God to Moses gave,  
Which, kept or broke, do spill or save.

Eleven with Christ in heaven do dwell,  
The Twelfth forever burns in hell.

Twelve are attending on God's Son,  
Twelve make our Creed. The Dial's done.

Count one, the first hour of thy Birth,  
The hours that follow, lead to Earth ;  
Count Twelve, thy doleful striking knell,  
And then thy Dial shall go well.

Sylvester prints also a modern form of the same hymn, apparently still used as a carol (also given by Sandys, p. 138), entitled "Man's Duty ; or, Meditation for the Twelve Hours of the Day."

It will be seen that the author of the "Dial" had before him in his mind the nine choirs of angels, which he has changed to nine muses. Thus we have evidence that at the beginning of the seventeenth century the number-song was popular in England.

Latin forms of this number-song have been preserved until the present day, having been used in cloisters and seminaries in Europe. The earliest of these Latin versions is preserved in a musical composition of Theodore Elinius (a Venetian, who died in 1602), intended for thirteen voices (L. Erk, "*Deutscher Liederhort*," Berlin, 1856). The words of the first part of the chant relate to the marriage at Cana. Those of the second part are as follows :—

"Dic mihi quis est unus? Unus est Jesus Christus qui regnat in æternum. Dic mihi quæ sunt duo? Duo tabulæ Moysis, unus est Jesus Christus, etc. Tres Patriarchæ, Abraham, Isaac, et Jacob. Quatuor Evangelistæ, etc. Quinque libri Moysis, etc. Sex hydiæ positæ in Cana Galileæ, etc. Septem dona spiritus, etc. Octo beatitudines, etc. Novem ordines (*i. e.* choirs of angels), etc. Decem

præcepta legis, etc. Undecim discipuli. Finally: Dic mihi quæ sunt duodecim? Duodecim articuli, undecim discipuli, decem præcepta legis," etc.

Similar modern Latin versions are printed by H. de la Villemarqué, "Barzaz-Breiz," No. 1, and in "Notes and Queries," 4th Ser. 2, 557. Instead of the discipuli, Villemarqué's version has "undecim stellæ a Josepho visæ." That of "Notes and Queries" has for the first number: "Unus est verus Deus, qui regnat in cœlis."

Our song is everywhere familiar in Western Europe,<sup>1</sup> where it is generally regarded as possessing something of a sacred character. Thus, on the Rhine it has been known as the Catholic Vesper, in Austria as the Pious Questions, while in a Spanish version the twelve words are declared to have been communicated by Christ, and in Languedoc it is employed at the time of learning the catechism. It is quite consistent with this sanctity that it should also be used as a drinking-song (on the Rhine); just as in England, though sung by the "waits" at Christmas, it has also served as a Biddeford boatman's song ("Notes and Queries," 4th Ser. 10, 499), and at the merrymakings of peasants.

In the German version the numbers are explained to mean: 2, the tables of Moses; 3, the patriarchs; 4, the evangelists; 5, the wounds of Christ; 6, the pitchers of Cana; 7, the sacraments; 8, the beatitudes; 9, the choirs of angels; 10, the commandments of God; 11, eleven thousand virgins; 12, the apostles.

Versions from Southern Europe explain the numbers as follows:—

In Languedoc: 1, God; 2, testaments; 3, Trinity; 4, evangel-

<sup>1</sup> A partial list of versions: *German*, Erk, *Deutscher Liederhort*, Berlin, 1856, p. 407; (Switzerland) Rochholz, *Alemannisches Kindertied und Kinderspiel*, Leip. 1857, p. 267; (Rhine) K. Simrock, *Deut. Volkslieder*, No. 335; (Austria) F. Tschischka and J. M. Schottky, *Oest. Volkslieder*, Pesth, 1844, p. 35; *Flemish*, J. Coussemaker, *Ch. pop. des Flamands de France*, Ghent, 1856, p. 129; A. Lootens and M. E. Feys, *Ch. pop. Flam.* Bruges, 1879, p. 260; *Provençal*, D. Arbaud, *Ch. pop. de la Prov.* 2, 42; (Languedoc) A. Montel and L. Lambert, *Ch. pop. du Lang.* p. 478; *Spanish* (Catalonia), F. P. Briz, *Cansons de la Terra*, Barc. 1871, 3, 5.

I do not include the remarkable production which begins the work of H. de la Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz*, No. 1, and which professes to be a series of this form of this song, containing Druidic ideas; it is well understood that the contributions of this author to Breton folk-lore are of an imaginative character. This method of procedure has been defended as an innocent embellishment of folk-song; but, in most cases, as in the present, the substance as well as form of the alleged traditions appear to be the product of fancy.

In Germany, during the seventeenth century (1649), just as in England, the song was altered into a hymn, beginning: *Ein Glaub allein, ein Glaub allein*, and by the eighteenth century (1720) had been made the basis of a parody in the form of a student's song, subsequently well known (Erk, p. 409).

ists ; 5, wounds of our Lord ; 6, lights of the temple (in Jerusalem) ; 7, joys of Our Lady ; 8, beatitudes ; 9, angels ; 10, commandments ; 11, stars (*i. e.* of Joseph's dream) ; 12, apostles.

In Provence : 1, Son of the Virgin Maria ; 2, tables of Moses ; 3, patriarchs ; 4, evangelists : these are *James* (author of the apocryphal gospel), Matthew, John, and Mark ; 5, wounds of Christ ; 6, lamps in Jerusalem ; 7, joys of the Mother of God ; 8, souls which descend from heaven to earth ; 9, offerings of St. Joseph ; 10, commandments ; 11, rays of moon ; 12, rays of sun (having reference, perhaps, to the sun, moon, and eleven stars which bowed before Joseph, Gen. xxxvii. 9).

In Spain : 1, the pure Virgin ; 2, tables of Moses ; 3, Trinity ; 4, evangelists ; 5, wounds of Christ ; 6, hours of the Cross ; 7, joys of St. Joseph ; 8, eight just souls ; 9, choirs of angels ; 10, commandments ; 11, eleven thousand virgins ; 12, apostles.

A version of this carol in Germany, at least, is sung as part of the Jewish Passover service ; the father of the family, in his own house, after the return from the synagogue, when the Paschal lamb has been eaten, and the fourth cup emptied, is expected to sing several songs, one of which corresponds to the carol in question. The Jewish number-song, as given in the ritual book of *Sepher Haggadah*, proceeds as follows :—

“One I know ; one and that is our God, who lives and moves, in heaven and on earth.”

The numbers following are said to denote : 2, the tables of Moses ; 3, the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) ; 4, the mothers (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah) ; 5, the books (of the Pentateuch) ; 6, the learning (sections of the Talmud, or Mishna) ; 7, the celebration (*i. e.* of the Sabbath) ; 8, the circumcision (which takes place on the eighth day) ; 9, the obtaining (of a child, after nine months) ; 10, the commandments ; 11, the stars (of Joseph's dream) ; 12, the tribes (of Israel). (See J. K. Ulrich, “*Sammlung Jüdischer Geschichten in der Schweiz*,” Basle, 1768, p. 138.)

The close correspondence between the Hebrew and German songs shows a community of origin, and it has naturally been assumed that the latter are translations from the former. But, according to Zunz, “*Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*,” Berlin, 1832, p. 126, the addition of this song, and others, to the Haggadah does not date before the fifteenth century. There cannot be much doubt that the song was well known in Europe as early as this. I should suppose that the borrowing was on the other side ; that the German Jews adopted and transformed a common Christian folk-song. This conclusion appears to me quite consistent with the character of both the Jewish and Christian forms of the song.

*William Wells Newell.*